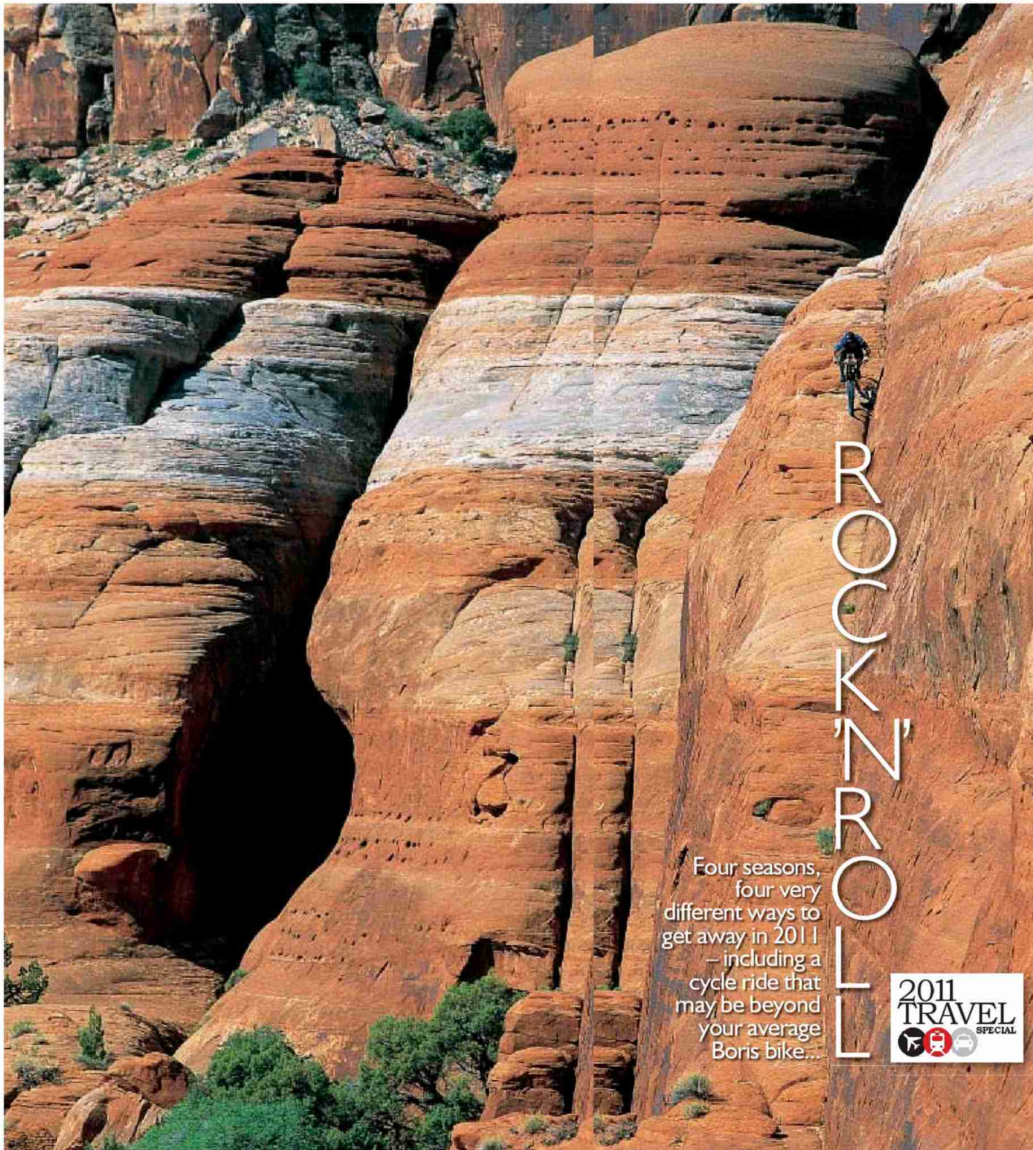


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UTAH
LIFE ELEVATED



STERLING LORENCE

Having barely got my breath back after a particularly painful climb, I was hammering down a lightning-quick section of the legendary Slickrock Trail in Utah. The track looked like



Precise.

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it went straight on but, suddenly, my riding guide veered sharp left around a large boulder, banking his bike hard and forcing it to make the turn. I followed suit, and as we came to a halt minutes later, he explained, grinning, the reason for the abrupt turn. 'You go straight on there and it'll take you over a sheer drop. It's 500ft straight down – certain death.'

That's Moab for you – one serious place to ride a mountain bike, and one of the greatest natural playgrounds on the planet thanks to its epic Slickrock Trail. Formed out of petrified sand dunes, this rock not only rolls, dips and jumps like the biggest skatepark you've ever seen, but being like sandpaper it also gives your mountain bike tyres more grip than you can imagine, letting you get away with lean angles and manoeuvres that would be impossible anywhere else.

There are downsides, such as the aforementioned plummet to your doom should you take a wrong turn (local riding guides are highly recommended if you haven't ridden there before), and the road rash that will accompany any other crash as the abrasive surface bites you rather than your tyres. But as one of the greatest mountain-bike destinations in the world, the rewards in Moab far outweigh the risks.

If you can tear yourself away from Slickrock, venturing on to any of the other myriad trails snaking out of Moab into the huge wilderness beyond, you'll find everything from chilled-out beginner's sightseeing trails to four-day epic trips into the wild that will throw everything at you: killer climbs and demon downhills, with plenty of cross-country mayhem in between.

Back in town for a meal, you'll find that Moab is one of the few places in America not dominated by the ubiquitous fast-food joints and mega-malls, and instead comes with an array of home-grown restaurants. If you can bear it, you could even get back on your bike and cycle to a local bar for a drink – on the rocks, of course. ■

For Moab bike hire and guides, go to rimtours.com, or moabcyclery.com



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So what are *you* doing this year?



Wild swimming Cornwall

Hurl yourself into the Atlantic for a bracing dose of wild swimming off the north Cornish coast. Assuming that the ice-cream headache doesn't leave you delirious, you can then enjoy exploring nearby caves and searching out seals and dolphins, before being whisked back to

your hotel for hot toddies by the fire.

The Scarlet, a refined hostelry near Newquay, specialises in great food and Ayurvedic massage.

Three nights at the Scarlet with two dinners, an hour's wild swimming and an hour's massage costs £490 per person.
scarlethotel.co.uk, 01637861800

Freestyle madness Switzerland

Improve your snowboarding at Europe's first public-access, indoor freestyle hall in Laax, Switzerland. Survive the compulsory induction and practise on a selection of ramps with foam pits before tackling the real slopes.

The place to stay? The minimalist Rider's Palace hotel.

Hotel rooms start at £36 per person, suites are £95

(riderspalace.ch). Induction costs £35. freestyle academy.laax.com, +41 81 927 7170



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Do mention the war Germany

Delve into the history of the Third Reich by visiting key locations in its gruesome 12-year history. Roger Moorhouse, author of *Berlin At War*, who will guide the first week-long tour this year, says, 'Germans used to feel guilty about their dark past but now there is a willingness to wrestle with those demons.'

The tour, staying at four-star hotels, will start in the Munich beer halls where the Nazi party was formed, before moving on to spots including Dachau concentration camp, Hitler's Eagle's Nest retreat in Bavaria and the site of the bunker where Hitler committed suicide. £1,950 per person. historicaltrips.com, 020 7993 6540

